

RESEARCH ARTICLE

INFLUENCES OF THE ROLES OF THE STAKEHOLDERS IN A COOPETITION ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE COOPETITION

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore the influence of the roles played by the stakeholders on the structure of a coopetition between very small enterprises. This structure is perceived through the prism of cross-views between clients, chargers and clandos. Our approach is constructivist, adopting an exploratory qualitative methodology with primary data collected from a questionnaire, administered to 14 chargers, 321 clandos and 335 clients. We used factorial correspondence analysis to process the data. The results indicate that stakeholders playing the roles of controller and regulator favour cooperative coopetition. When they play the roles of mediator and facilitator, they favour balanced coopetition in which cooperation and competition are equal. Finally, when stakeholders play the roles of communicator and coordinator, they favour competitive coopetition. The theoretical implication of this research complements the theory of coopetition by showing that stakeholders in a competitive environment influence the structure of coopetition. As a managerial contribution, we suggest that organizational managers take into account the influence of stakeholders in a competitive ecosystem in order to implement a dynamic strategy based on the actors involved. One prospect is to test our results using a quantitative approach and hypothetico-deductive reasoning with an analytical framework based on the theory of dynamic capabilities.

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INTRODUCTION

Coopetition can be considered as a new approach in the field of business relationships, offering companies a new perspective to achieve positive results. In a competitive market, stakeholders participate in the life of the market and influence its daily functioning. Each can play several roles. In our context, the market is composed of carriers, the carrier association, clients and vehicle chargers. This market is competitive because carriers cooperate and are also in competition. This paper focuses on the influences of the roles of stakeholders in a competitive market between VSEs, on the structure of coopetition. Coopetition is a dynamic relationship of inter-firm strategy in which competition and cooperation occur simultaneously. Thelisson (2023) examines the management of the paradox of coopetition among others, at the interorganizational and individual levels. He indicates that competitive tensions can arise when strategic decisions are imposed on firms that require them to seek competition and collaboration with other organizations (Thelisson, 2023). It is important to explore the tension between the two components of coopetition, namely, competition and cooperation, under the influence of the roles played by market stakeholders.

Indjendje Ndala (2024a, 2024b, 2024c) recently studied the roles of a non-institutional intermediary and Indjendje Ndala (in press) studied the roles of the client in a coopetition. It remains to be explored how these roles influence the tension of the dynamic structure of coopetition. It is essential to understand how cooperation and competition interact in coopetition relationships (Boutru & Mourey, 2024; Guimarães *et al.*, 2015; Sanchez & Mandran, 2017), under the influence of stakeholders' roles on this delicate balance. In the vein of Kechidi & Talbot (2010), Depeyre & Dumez (2007) and Salvétat & Géraudel (2011), Perrin (2017), Thelisson (2023) and Kostis *et al.* (2024) who have, among others, studied the tension between cooperation and competition in coopetition, and that of Chiambaretto *et al.* (2019) who argues that it is necessary to continue exploring the different levels of competitive relationships. Sward *et al.* (2022) suggest that to better understand competitive dynamics, more research on the action-reaction cycles that shape aspects of cooperation and competition over time, is needed. Kotsio *et al.* (2024) suggest exploring the microfoundations of coopetition structure. Rai *et al.* (2023) propose concepts such as cooperative capacity and

some researchers such as Klein & al. (2020) have attempted to clarify coooperative dynamics by incorporating concepts from the competitive dynamics literature into coopetition research. Then, we ask ourselves "how do stakeholders' roles influence the structure of coopetition?" The objective of this paper is to show that the roles played by carriers, clients and chargers in a coooperative market influence coooperative tension by balancing coooperation and coooperation. We attempt to provide insight that will contribute to advancing knowledge in the field of coopetition. Our empirical field is based on stakeholders' perceptions of their own roles in coopetition. The actors are interviewed in several parking sites for carriers' vehicles in two important municipalities of Gabon, Libreville and Owendo, respectively the capital and the most important port city. These cities concentrate the largest number of clandos. To answer the research question, this work follows a framework composed of a literature review, the research methodology, the results and their discussions before concluding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

We present coooperation and its structure, the possible roles played by the stakeholders.

COOPERATION: TENSION BETWEEN COOPERATION AND COMPETITION: The definition of coooperation is not yet a consensus. Coooperation mixes both the competitive and cooperative postures of the actors (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996). Dagnino & al. (2007) define coooperation as: "a rapprochement of interests between complements when coooperation and competition occur simultaneously". As for Bengtsson & Kock (2014, p.25), coooperation is "a paradoxical relationship between two or more actors who are simultaneously involved in cooperative and competitive interactions, regardless of their horizontal or vertical dimension". Coooperative tensions can arise when strategic decisions are imposed on firms that require them to seek competition and collaboration with other organizations (Thelisson, 2023). Theodoraki & al. (2020) reveal that coooperation strategies evolve during an incubation process. They highlight the link between competition-dominated, competition-cooperation-equal, and cooperation-dominated coooperation relationships and the incubation process (Theodoraki & al., 2020). Several authors have studied the tension of coooperative dynamics between competition and cooperation, including Depeyre & Dumez (2007), Kechidi & Talbot (2010), Salvétat & Géraudel (2011), Perrin (2017) and Gonçalves & Guimarães (2020). Indjendje Ndala (2024a) argues that an intermediary influences coooperative tension, by balancing competition and cooperation, by promoting a coooperation where competition dominates cooperation. Bahar & al. (2022) show that hotels pursue both forces, cooperative coooperation or competitive coooperation, near and far from the client in a balanced way. Kotsio & al. (2024) allows us to discover the microfoundations of cooperation-competition interaction that lead to changes in coooperative dynamics. These authors find four contributions on coooperative dynamics, competition dominated, cooperation dominated, weak balanced cooperation-competition and strong balanced cooperation-competition. Our exploratory research attempts to show that the roles of stakeholders in a coooperation influence

its structure by obtaining in particular a more cooperative coooperation or a more competitive coooperation or a balanced coooperation between coooperation and competition. To do this, the field we explore concerns alternative transporters, the clandos. The clando is the name in Gabon, of a craftsman exercising a transport activity with a vehicle, most often, 3rd, 4th, or even 5th hand. The existence of under-integrated neighborhoods allowed the creation of this activity. These are craftsmen who transport clients living in areas where conventional taxis do not arrive, because these areas are not profitable. These clandos are in coooperation because they cooperate by federating in an association, by perpetuating the activity. They compete on the position at the parking place to embark the clients. This activity has developed over two decades. The stakeholders or actors who make up the ecosystem of the clando activity are: the transporters, the chargers, the clients, the police, the associations and the unions of the transport sector, the City Hall and the State. We retain as stakeholders for this paper the clients, the transporters or clandos and the chargers.

STAKEHOLDERS CLIENTS, CLANDOS AND CHARGERS:

In this research, the stakeholders are the clandos who are the coooperators, the clients who use this mode of transport and the chargers who help the clients to board the vehicles and who regulate the market. Hiesse & al. (2009) believe that the reticular structure assumes the existence of a third party likely to influence cooperation. We retain the form of coooperation regulated by a third party (Hannachi & Coléno, 2012). Zulu-Chisanga & al. (2023) reveal, among other things, that clients are at the origin of the triggering of the propensity to develop and benefit from the coooperation capacity. Salvétat & Géraudel (2011, p. 72) cite actors such as clients who have legitimate public power "The client was playing with the duality, encouraging competition and rivalry between partners. He tried to turn the situation to its own advantage. The client did not represent a facilitator of management" (Fernandez & Le Roy, 2015, p.21). To our knowledge, it is rare to find in the literature work positioning stakeholders and their roles in coooperative tension. Although they can play several roles and influence the structure of coooperation.

THE ROLES OF STAKEHOLDERS: The definition of stakeholder according to Freeman (1984) remains the reference, by far the most mobilized: "a stakeholder in the organization is any group of individuals or any individual who can affect or be affected by the achievement of organizational objectives." According to Rocheblave-Spenlé (1969), he defines the role as "an organized model of behavior, relative to a certain position of the individual in an interactional set." As for Katz & Kahn (1966), they define organizational roles as "the set of activities, behaviors and expectations or demands commonly associated with a job in a given organization". These authors consider that the role is not strictly imposed on the individual, but that it is constructed in an interaction. We will review the roles of the stakeholders clients, clandos and chargers in a coooperation market. They can play several roles including facilitator, communicator, mediator, coordinator, controller and regulator. Salvétat & Géraudel (2011) present a complete typology of the intermediary actor who is coordinator, controller, facilitator, approver, legitimator and peacemaker. According to Schwarz (2002, p. 41), Geindre (2005) and Gonçalves & Guimarães (2020), the facilitator

intermediary is a neutral third party, acceptable to all members of the group and promotes the conditions for the existence of cooperation between competing companies by establishing and guaranteeing “standard” relational rules of the game. The facilitator structures group discussions towards a voluntary settlement, using collaborative negotiation techniques (Blomgren Bingham & O’Leary, 2015, p. 253). Hiesse *et al.* (2009, p. 19) and Salvétat & Géraudel (2011, pp. 70, 74) argue that the intermediary can be a controller of the relationship between actors in cooperative actions and enforce the rules set. Jerman *et al.* (2020) argue that the controller can be a facilitator of compromise. As for the role of communicator, we specify that it is more a question of communicator than of communicator.

That is to say, a person who communicates effectively, or who establishes communication and who knows how to impose his message on the public. Communication serves to develop informal relationships between individuals. The communicator tends to create a certain horizontality with others, whether they are enemies or opponents, good or bad. An intermediary can adopt one of the archetypes of the Kets De Vries (2006) typology, being, among other things, a negotiator and a communicator. Conflicts are successfully resolved through effective communication and the mediation of friends and colleagues (Kilag *et al.*, 2024). Mediation is a means of resolving collective conflicts using a third party who brings together points of view and recommends a possible solution (Denis, Martinet & Silem, 2016, p.405). In mediation, the intermediary uses the communication to accomplish his role. The mediator simply acts as a conduit, a contact taker and a message carrier. Ralandison *et al.* (2018), Fernandez *et al.* (2011) and Salvétat & Géraudel (2011) studied the strategic role of mediator in the cooperative relationship. Bengtsson & Kock (2000) show that a third party plays a key role as coordinator in cooperative relationships because he coordinates and controls the pooling of flows and can also manage conflicts between competitors.

The intermediary can ensure the management of conflicts between competing partners, therefore it acts as a regulator (Hiesse *et al.*, 2009, p. 19, Gonçalves & Guimarães, 2020). The regulator is considered by OECD (2016, p. 3), as a market arbiter. Ralandison *et al.* (2018) notes the need for an intermediary playing the role of joint regulator. As for Thelisson (2023), he indicates that the State and clients play a regulatory role and influence cooperative tensions in merger processes, negotiation and integration stages. More recently, Indjendje Ndala (2024b) studied the roles of an independent intermediary in a cooperation, playing the roles of coordinator, mediator or facilitator of regulator, coordinator and organizer, respectively influencing the permeabilization and impermeabilization of the barrier to entry of a cooperative market. Indjendje Ndala (2024c) studied the influence of the roles of stakeholders in the resolution of conflicts between competitors. The author finds that the stakeholders play the roles of communicator, facilitator, controller, mediator and regulator. Indjendje Ndala (in press) finds that the roles played by the client in a cooperation are facilitator, communicator and mediator. We retain from the above that the stakeholders of cooperation generally play roles such as controller, facilitator, mediator, coordinator, regulator and communicator, which we specify in our empirics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We present the epistemological posture and the methodological approach of the research.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSTURE AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: Our epistemological posture is constructivist because we seek to build from the field data a theorization of an empirical reality. Our methodological approach is exploratory and mixed, qualitative-quantitative. The problem studied reflects the need to understand a phenomenon. Indeed, the client who influences the functioning of a cooperative market between individual companies, as they are extracted or found in interactions and experiences. We seek to understand the roles, other than consumer, played by the client. The knowledge that develops through this vision is based on the observation of a reality described or restored by the actors themselves.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA PROCESSING TECHNIQUES: This work is based on a field study with clients, clandos and chargers in a cooperative alternative transport activity. Our research design follows an inductive reasoning, summarized in Figure 1. We opt for a reflexive view of these stakeholders. Our research being exploratory, the field data are obtained by the perceptions of clients, clandos and chargers themselves on their own roles and on the tension between cooperation and competition in cooperative relationships. The primary data are collected by administering a questionnaire to 14 chargers, 321 clandos and 335 clients. The results of this data processing allow us to better contribute to defining these roles in a cooperation.

EMPIRICAL APPROACH: STUDY FIELD AND DATA: We present the context of the study, the data by summarizing the responses of the informants useful for this paper.

Context of the study: The study areas that we are considering are the commune of Owendo, which has 6 parking sites where clandos operate, and the commune of Libreville, which has 21 sites. Owendo has approximately 75,000 inhabitants according to the 2016 census. The city of Libreville, which is the capital of Gabon, has approximately 600,000 inhabitants. According to the Ministry of Economy, 78% of the population uses alternative transport. The operation of the clando activity is limited to parking different vehicles in order of arrival and in single file to load clients. In an incremental process from the head of the line to the tail, the vehicle is loaded (4 to 5 clients). When all the spaces are occupied, the clando starts and the next one positions itself at the head to fill it, etc. The number of clients transported daily is on average 60 to 70 per vehicle. The prices of approved journeys from 100 to 300 CFA francs. The clandos operate in a cooperative market, that is to say that they are in competition and cooperation at the same time. Indeed, they compete on clients, on revenue, and on the parking position because the first to arrive is the first to load. The clandos cooperate to maintain and perpetuate the activity, they cooperate on the price of the journey, they federate in an association of clandos to better organize the activity. The primary data were collected between January and June 2023 on the basis of a questionnaire administered face to face to the informants.

The questions concerned, among other things, the personal data of the stakeholder interviewed, the characterization of the relationships between market actors, the roles played by the stakeholder interviewed in this market, etc. We interviewed 335 clients, 321 clandos and 14 loaders in the different parking sites. The sample of the clandos' clients was randomly selected and that of the chargers by contact and appointment. We summarize the information collected from the clients.

Summary of responses from clients, clandos and chargers:

We surveyed 57% men and 43% women. The average age of the clients surveyed is 30 years old. The clients surveyed consider that they play the roles of facilitators for 59%, controllers for 58%, communicators for 49%, regulators for 46%, coordinators for 35%, mediators for 29%. They estimate at 32% that cooptation is cooperative, at 39% that it is competitive and at 29% that it is balanced. The clandos consider that they are controller at 98%, coordinator at 96%, regulator at 71%, communicator at 32%, facilitator at 15% and mediator at 6%. The clandos estimate at 45% that cooptation is cooperative, 43% that it is competitive and 12% that it is balanced. Chargers consider themselves to be 93% controller, 79% regulator, 57% organizer, 45% administrator, 36% facilitator, 36% coordinator, 36% mediator, 14% communicator. Chargers consider cooptation to be 29% cooperative, 50% competitive and 21% balanced. For 61% of stakeholders combined, cooptation concerns parking position, for 50% of them, it concerns the number of clients, for 48%, working hours and for 45%, revenue.

DATA PROCESSING TECHNIQUES AND VARIABLES USED:

We present the variables used and their operationalization as well as the data processing technique, factorial correspondence analysis.

Factor Correspondence Analysis (CFA): The AFC is a statistical method of data analysis that allows to analyze and prioritize the information contained in a contingency table and is used to study the link between two qualitative variables in our context the role of stakeholders with six modalities and the structure of cooptation with three modalities. The AFC makes an estimate of the factors, the underlying constructs that we cannot measure directly. The AFC therefore consists of synthesizing a contingency table that is too large. In the contingency table, we designate the columns under the name of the modalities of the cooptation structure (cooperative cooptation, competitive cooptation and balanced cooptation) and the rows under the name of the modalities of the roles played by the stakeholders (controller, coordinator, communicator, facilitator, regulator, mediator), which are analyzed. In AFC, we represent the modalities of the two variables on the same graph because the space of the rows and the space of the columns are the same. For the interpretation of the positions of the modalities of the two variables in the same space, we retain that the modalities of the interpretable variables are those that are far from the center of the cloud of points. The proximity of two well-projected modalities of the same variable indicates that the individuals who take these modalities have similar profiles on the rest of the other variables. The proximity of two modalities of different variables tends to indicate that it is the same individuals who take these modalities, but this is not always the case. If a modality is graphically very far from the others, then it has a

very specific profile in the contingency table. Its position in the factorial plane being isolated, it prevents a precise study of the positions of the other points which are found "in a packet". It is recommended in this case to make this modality inactive (we put it in additional character), which amounts to carrying out the AFC of the initial table by eliminating the line or column representing this modality.

Variables and their operationalization: We mobilize seven qualitative variables the structure of the cooptation coded Alliance_i and the roles played by the stakeholders summarized in table 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We present the result of the factorial analysis of correspondences, its interpretations and the discussions.

FACTOR CORRESPONDENCE ANALYSIS

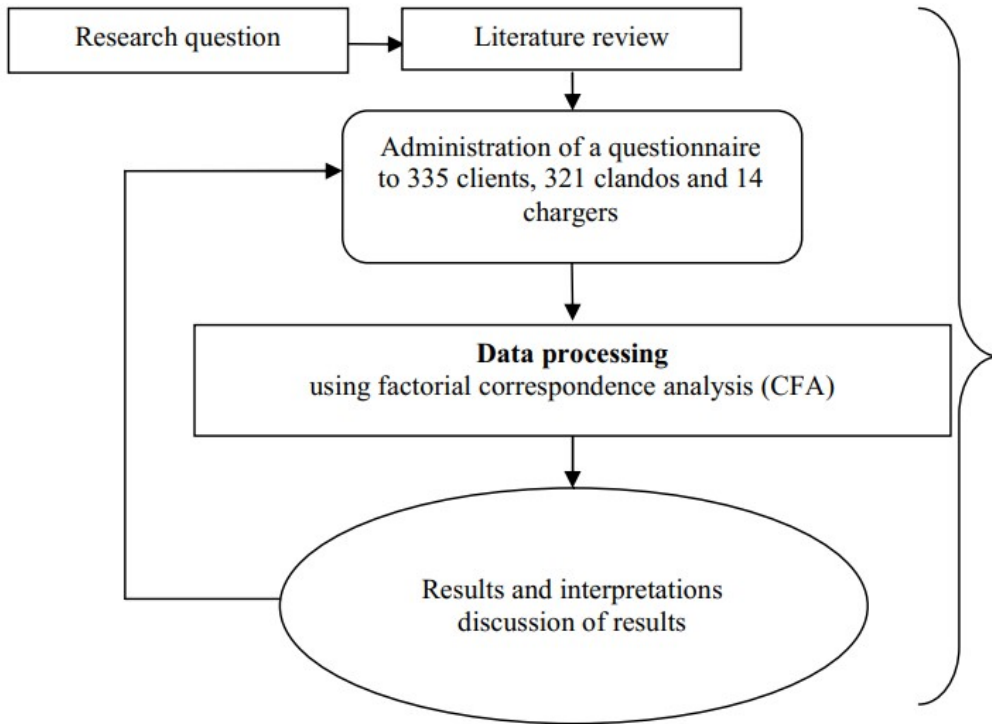
OUTCOME: We interpret the results of the AFC from Figure 2. When stakeholders play facilitator and mediator roles then cooptation tends to be balanced between cooperation and competition. When stakeholders play coordinator and communicator roles then cooptation tends to be competitive cooptation. Finally, when they play controller and regulator roles then cooptation tends to be cooperative cooptation.

The AFC results and interpretations induce the figure 3 and following research results R1, R2 and R3:

- **R1:** "stakeholders playing the roles of controller and regulator promote cooperative cooptation."
- **R2:** "stakeholders playing the roles of facilitator and mediator balance cooperation and competition."
- **R3:** "stakeholders playing the roles of communicator and coordinator promote competitive cooptation."

DISCUSSIONS OF THE RESULTS

We discuss the results of this research in relation to the existing literature. Stakeholder roles influence the structure of cooptation between cooperation and competition. The roles of communicator and coordinator lead to competitive cooptation. Stakeholder communication and coordination with cooptation actors adds more competition to cooptation. This result can be explained by the arguments of Chen *et al.* (2018) the coordination mechanisms when traders compete only in terms of their prices, and when they engage in price and service competition simultaneously, but Fathalikhani *et al.* (2019, p. 1) emphasize that the barrier to coordination is competition. Communication and competition are, among other things, means put in place to formulate a business strategy (Timeridjine, 2022). The regulation of electronic communications and the regulation of competition rules show how possible distortions in cooptation relationships could be addressed within the framework of market supervision (Marty, 2020). The result on the role of communicator is in line with Indjendje Ndala (2024a) and the typology of Kets De Vries (2006). Stakeholders develop common beliefs, explicit or implicit values and common objectives to facilitate coordination (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1986, p. 385).



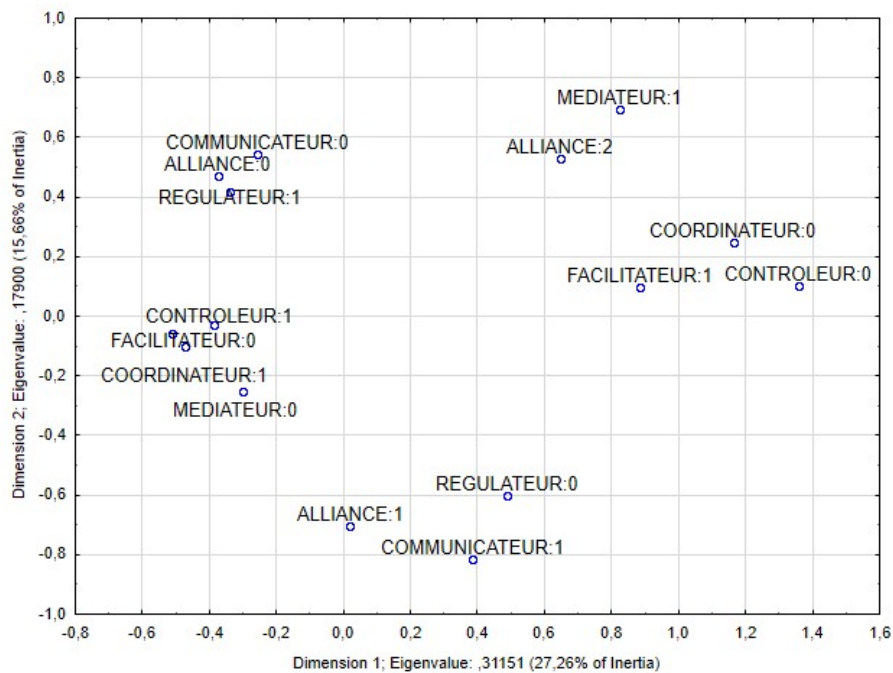
Source: Author 2024.

Figure 1. Exploratory research design

Table 1. Variables, modalities and their operationalization

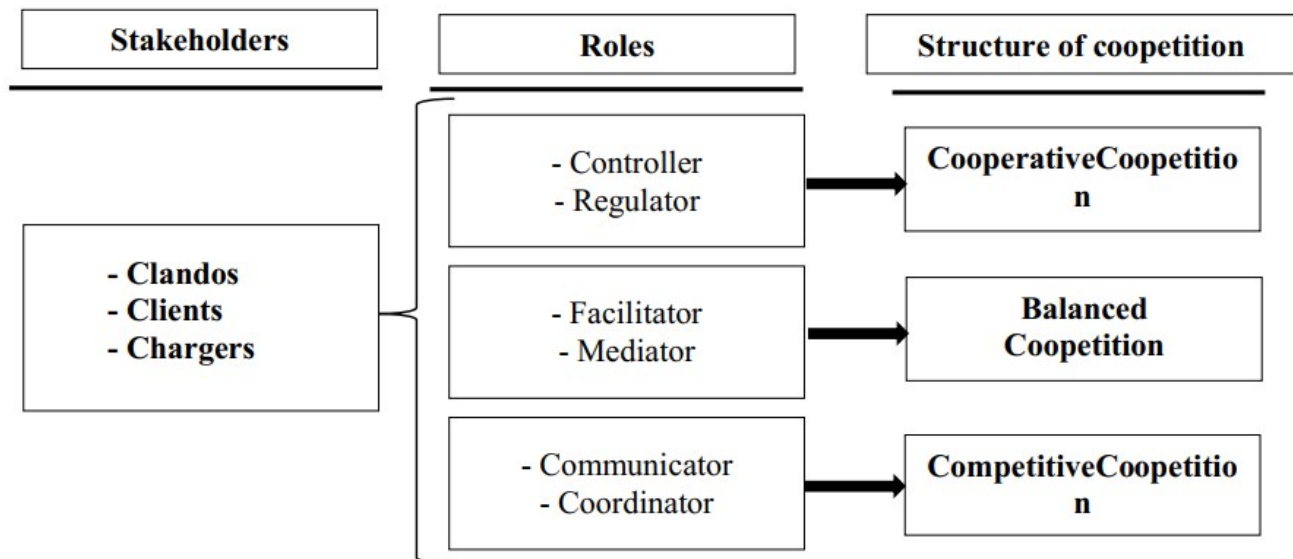
Conditions	Terms or values of conditions		
<i>ALLIANCE</i> _{i}	<i>i</i> =0 : Cooperative competition	<i>i</i> =1 : competitive Cooperation	<i>i</i> =2 : balanced Competition where no component (cooperation, competition) dominates
<i>CONTROLEUR</i> _{i}	<i>i</i> =0 : the stakeholder is not a controller	<i>i</i> =1 : the stakeholder is a controller	
<i>COORDINATEUR</i> _{i}	<i>i</i> =0 : the stakeholder is not a coordinator	<i>i</i> =1 : the stakeholder is a coordinator	
<i>COMMUNICATEUR</i> _{i}	<i>i</i> =0 : the stakeholder is not a communicator.	<i>i</i> =1 : the stakeholder is a communicator.	
<i>FACILITATEUR</i> _{i}	<i>i</i> =0 : the stakeholder is not a facilitator	<i>i</i> =1 : the stakeholder is a facilitator	
<i>REGULATEUR</i> _{i}	<i>i</i> =0 : the stakeholder is not a regulator	<i>i</i> =1 : the stakeholder is the regulator	
<i>MEDIATEUR</i> _{i}	<i>i</i> =0 : the stakeholder is not a mediator	<i>i</i> =1 : the stakeholder is a mediator	

Source: Author 2024.



Source: Author 2024, graph of role structure correspondences of cooperation

Figure 2. Factor correspondence analysis graphic



Source: Author 2024

Figure 3. Theoretical model of the influence of stakeholder roles on the structure of competition

They impose themselves and significantly affect the functioning and progress of the activity. We agree with the results of Indjendje Ndala (2024a, in press) concerning clients and chargers who play, respectively, the role of communicator and the role of coordinator which influence competitive competition. Stakeholders who play the roles of mediator and facilitator balance competition between cooperation and competition of clandos traders. Indeed, these roles serve to arbitrate, appease and mitigate rivalries. This result, which is difficult to achieve practically in the field, can nevertheless be explained theoretically in the case where stakeholders resolve conflicts between competitors in the market. We agree with Bahar *et al.* (2022) who show that cooperation and competition are balanced, whether clients are close or distant. The result on the role of mediator is in line with authors such as Salvétat & Géraudel (2011), Fernandez *et al.* (2011) and Ralandison *et al.* (2018) but is opposed to Fernandez & Le Roy (2015, p.21) who consider the client as a source of conflict. This result is opposed to the work of Indjendje Ndala (2024a) which shows that chargers playing the roles of facilitator and mediator influence competition by promoting more competition to obtain competitive competition. Stakeholders who play the roles of controller and regulator add more cooperation to competition. Regulation and control lead to cooperative competition. This result can be explained in a hyper-competitive business environment or even in an environment of unfair competition. Stakeholders will favor competition in which cooperation will mitigate the perverse effects of competition. This result is in agreement with Indjendje Ndala (2024b, 2024c, in press), where chargers and clients play the role of controller. Our result supports Hiesse *et al.* (2009), Ralandison *et al.* (2018) and OECD (2016) who find that the charger plays the role of regulator.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this research, we studied the influence of the roles of stakeholders on the structure of a competition between VSEs.

We tried to answer the question: "how is the structure of a competition influenced by the roles played by the stakeholders?" We adopted a constructivist posture and inductive reasoning. We mobilized a review of the literature on competition and the tensions between cooperation and competition and the roles played by the actors who participate in a competitive market between VSEs. The primary data were collected by a questionnaire, with a majority of open questions, from 335 clients, 321 clandos and 14 chargers. Our methodological approach is qualitative exploratory. These primary data were processed by the technique of factorial correspondence analysis. The results of the research teach us that the roles of the stakeholders modify the structure of competition. Indeed, the facilitator and mediator roles balance competition between cooperation and competition. The controller and regulator roles transform competition into cooperative competition. The coordinator and communicator roles transform competition into competitive competition.

The continuous presence of stakeholders in the competitive market helps to strengthen regulation, mediation, coordination, communication, facilitation and control, thus creating an environment favorable to cooperative competition, competitive competition or balanced competition. Through their involvement, they actively contribute to greater collaboration, cooperation or competition between competitors. In the current context of competition, it is important for companies to recognize the roles of stakeholders and to value them. The theoretical contribution of this paper is the stakeholder role model on the tension between cooperation and competition in the competition structure. This result complements the literature of competition theory. We bring another vision to the continuum of inter-firm relations of Dagnino *et al.* (2007). Indeed, under the prism of the roles played by the stakeholders, we give a new reading of the continuum of strategic relations between firms which would move from "pure competition, competitive competition, balanced competition, cooperative competition, to pure cooperation".

As a managerial contribution, this study allows managers and strategy practitioners to adopt a specific type of role to make the structure of cooptation dynamic. Because cooptation can move from balanced cooptation to competitive cooptation or cooperative cooptation, by adopting a very specific role. Which contributes to energizing strategic games in the business world. We identify some limitations, in particular, the sample of the study which could be expanded to include a greater diversity of sectors of activity. In addition, a comparative approach with other models of cooperation and competition could offer enriching perspectives for a better understanding of the cooptation structure. Finally, the absence of a precise theoretical framework. As a perspective, we propose to replicate this research in other sectors where cooptation reigns and in several other geographical and cultural contexts. Indeed, comparisons could be envisaged by studying companies belonging to other sectors in order to decontextualize (Eisenhardt, 1991, p. 626) the phenomenon and extend the results. This would also allow us to test our theoretical model and allow a good generalization of the results.

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